

# Crossroads

THE MAGAZINE



## People

**One family makes strides in son's ongoing battle with autism**

## Arts & Entertainment

**Southern football fans show support for team in a variety of ways**

## Health & Living

**Journey into the world of extraordinary body art with local tattoo artists**

**Fall 2003**

**Missouri Southern State University**



# *Crossroads* Fall 2003

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& Living



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Change is inevitable. Whether it is good or bad, insignificant or life altering, some change cannot be avoided. The fall season is a great example of the prevalence of change. The leaves are transforming from green to gold; department stores are swapping their displays of swim-suits for sweaters, and even Missouri Southern worked to change its college name to a more prestigious university title.

This fall marks the first official semester at Missouri Southern State University-Joplin. The change brings a new surge of pride toward the students, faculty and administration.

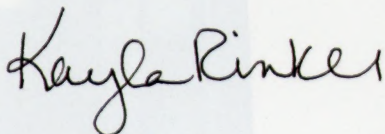
If Missouri Southern is ready and willing to change, we at *Crossroads: The Magazine* know you are, too. In this issue we have included stories that support, inspire and embrace all aspects of change.

For example, the surfing feature on Page 23 depicts a dramatic change of scenery uncommon for this area. These young Australian surfers are dedicated to changing the face of evangelism by combining their enthusiasm for the waves with their passion for the ministry.

Bad habits, especially gossip, can be one of the hardest things people have to overcome. The story on Page 31, forces readers to take a hard look at the issue of interpersonal gossip. The story details the dangers of idle chatter and explains some simple ways to abolish those bad habits for good.

Getting married is probably the biggest change a person can make in his or her life. The column on Page 37 depicts the humorous side of married life and all the ups and downs that go along with it.

All changing aside, I am extremely proud of this fall 2003 issue of *Crossroads*. The entire staff has come together to ensure that there is something in it for everyone. So read on and discover what's in it for you.



Kayla Rinker  
Editor







Cleon and Bettye Foust have been dedicated volunteers in the gift shop at St. John's Regional Medical Center in Joplin for more than 20 years.

# Shining Volunteers

Story by Jerry Manter

Photos by Christine Thrasher

## Area residents devote their lives to helping others.

When it comes to finding a needle in a haystack, St. John's Regional Medical Center has found two.

The hospital found Cleon and Bettye Foust.

Together the married couple has volunteered more than 42,000 hours to the hospital's auxiliary service.

"I've always thought about volunteering," Bettye said. "I felt like I had to give back."

More than 20 years ago, Bettye's mother was hospitalized at St. Johns for five weeks.

Spending time with her mother in the hospital gave her an opportunity to famil-

iarize herself with staff and many of the volunteers.

"I saw all the good that the auxiliary was doing," Bettye said. "It's what planted the seed."

Bettye and Cleon worked together at Ozark Memorial Park, retiring two years apart from one another, Bettye in 1978 and Cleon in 1980. They have always worked together, and when they finished with the work force, they knew they wanted to volunteer.

"We've always been together," Cleon said. "Never had any problems."

Staying together has held true for 62 years. Bettye joined in 1978 and enjoyed

herself immediately. When Cleon retired, Bettye thought her husband would fit in perfect with the other ladies of the auxiliary.

The only catch, however, was the lack of male volunteers: St. John's had none.

Bettye knew her husband would be a good candidate to help break down the stereotype.

"It didn't bother me at all," Cleon said.

Whether it's working the information desk, helping run the hospital's gift shop, or even making homemade gifts for the annual craft show, Bettye and Cleon just want to stay busy.

"We've never looked back on it," Bettye



said. "It gives us something to do."

Some days are harder than others. Visitors come in the hospital gift shop to purchase a gift for the person staying in the hospital. Sometimes, Bettye and Cleon know that the person they are visiting has already passed on.

It's hard, but they never say a word.

Pamela Hosp, volunteer coordinator with St. John's, has treasured the friendships she's made over the years. She's especially grown close to Cleon and Bettye.

"These two epitomize what volunteering



**Cleon Foust delivers flowers to patient Kirk Wyckoff of Parsons, Kansas.**

is," Hosp said. "They give themselves to better the community."

St. John's has an estimated 900 volunteers. Hosp coordinates four programs, leaving her in charge of 400. With one and

a half employees, Hosp being the single full time employee, and a part-time staff member, things stay rather busy.

"My biggest challenge is keeping everyone informed," Hosp said. "It's very difficult to have the information filter to everyone."

The volunteer auxiliary serves 50,000 hours every year to the hospital, and in 10 years has donated more than \$1 million.

"The hospital couldn't stay open without volunteers," she said.

Working with Cleon and Bettye means a great deal to Hosp. It's volunteers like them who make Hosp's job a little easier.

"I get to work with these people who want to work," she said.

During the past couple of years, the couple has concentrated on the gift shop. The couple has organized the shop so well that they know the price of nearly every item.

"It's all at the top of my head," Cleon said.

When visitors come in, they always give their best to make conversation, and maybe make the customer's day a little brighter.

"We enjoy the gift shop," he said. "We have time to visit with people and help them."

One customer came in and asked for some quarters. Cleon looked inside the register, but it was low on change.

He immediately dug into his pockets, and his wallet and came up with nothing.



**Cleon presents Bettye with a vase of flowers.**

He then questioned his wife on whether or not she had any spare change.

"I don't have any, but I can go find some," she said.

They were unable to help the customer, but were confident they did everything they could to help.

At 88 years old, Cleon feels healthy. At 82 years old, Bettye feels great as well. They have found their fountain of youth, and know it has helped them stay healthy.

"The only thing that's slowing us down is personal illness," she said. "And, there's not much of that."

At their age, the couple makes many younger people look old.

"When people stop and sit down, that's when you get old," she said.

If Bettye's watching television at home, she's almost always working on her home-made crafts.

"I never sit down, I'm almost always busy," she said.

Hosp knows firsthand how important it is for a hospital to have volunteers. It's even better when it has volunteers like Cleon and Bettye.

"They've devoted so much of their married life," she said.

When visitors of the hospital come to the gift shop, many are shocked that the couple hasn't been paid a dime for more than 20 years of service.

"We tell them that we do it out of love," Cleon said.

Although money is nice, it doesn't matter to them. They've known all this time, that in the end, they're the lucky ones.

"All your life you can just take, take and take," Bettye said. "You have to give a little."



**The Fousts assist Sherri Mims, a nurse at St. John's Regional Medical Center, in the gift shop.**





Braydon Patton and his mother, Peggy Clark, play together often during the day. Braydon is diagnosed with Aspergus, a form of autism.

# Every Day Can Be A Challenge

Story and photos by Natosha Rogers

## One family works together in effort to overcome autism.

It all began with a routine check-up when Braydon Patton was about 2 months old.

"We took him to the pediatrician and she asked us if he always acted this way, which to us was normal," said Peggy Clark, Braydon's mother. "He was constantly hitting and laying in the floor screaming. To me it was typical little boy stuff, but the pediatrician knew there was more going on."

Their pediatrician sent them to Barbara Thompson, a certified counselor at Snyder & Associates, and she began seeing Braydon weekly.

"After a couple of weeks she diagnosed

him with ADHD severe and she instantly saw that there were speech and sensory problems," Peggy said.

"Then, a couple of weeks later she told us she believed he has Aspergus, which is a form of autism."

Braydon's family consists of his father Jason, his mother Peggy, and his two sisters, Madison, 8 years old, and Tanisha, 7 years old. Both Jason and Peggy work and attend school at Missouri Southern. They take a full load of online classes through the University.

"After the kids go to bed, it's quiet time for me," Peggy said. "I do my tests and homework online. If I had to actually go to

the school, there's no way I could do it."

Jason and Peggy began Braydon's speech and occupational therapy daily at the Webb City Development Center. Once there was an opening, he started attending regular school there. He started out going three days a week, but now attends five days.

"The therapists come in and take him out of class and then take him back," Peggy said.

"It's basically like a preschool setting. They have children with all sorts of problems, to almost completely normal children. He needed structure and routine in his life and it has made a difference."



Braydon has speech therapy twice a week in 30-minute sessions and occupational therapy twice a week in 45-minute sessions.

"The occupational therapy is for the sensory integration," she said. "He has a problem with touch and textures. What first brought this to our attention was when we would watch him pick up a flower or play in the grass. As soon as he'd touch it, he'd drop it and wipe his hands. That's not really a normal thing for a child to do."

### Speech therapy

Ramona Perkins, speech language pathologist, has worked with Braydon for more than a year now. She says he has progressed "marvelously well."

"I work with children who have developmental disabilities, who have difficulty talking, thinking, or communicating in a variety of ways," Perkins said.

"It's not just words. I use signs, gestures, objects, and whatever I can to get them to let me know what they want."

To assess each child, Perkins gives a bat-

tery of tests, both standardized and non-standardized.

"I show them pictures and they have to name things and I see how they manipulate objects," she said. "So I try to meet them right where they are and challenge them to a step higher."

Each session is filled with a variety of things. They read books, do colors, sign language, prepositions, and flash cards.

"We also do what's called syllable tapping because a lot of the kids I work with only say parts of a word," she said. "I try to get them to realize that a word is more than just one part."

Perkins first encountered Braydon and his family at a school where she was working.

She said Peggy seemed desperate to find some kind of help.

"She knew something was not right. It seemed to me that she just couldn't quite get any help, and I had to occupy him while she could even write a few sentences on a piece of paper," Perkins said.

"The whole family seemed very frustrat-

ed. They wanted help but just didn't know what to do."

Now Braydon will sit in a chair for 30 to 45 minutes during each session with no problems.

"He walks in, he tells me what he wants, he sits back down, he works, he's glad to be here, and whenever he sees me he comes running up," she said. "So it's not just structured, it's like he has a desire to communicate. That's positive and I think one of the best things in my job is making a difference in someone's view on life, even if they are a little kid."

Perkins always tries to include a book in each session and she keeps a list of words that they worked on so that it can carry over to the child's home.

"Peggy is really good about working with him, too," she said. "So, that's a key. I can't possibly 'fix a child,' without a lot of other people. I'm just a small part. I try to be an advocate for them at home and at school."

Perkins said the good definitely outweighs the bad in her field of work.



Ramona Perkins, speech language pathologist, shows Braydon Patton flash cards of different animals while he imitates the sign for each animal. Braydon's sessions consist of flash cards, identifying colors, reading books and playing games.



"I'm exhausted at the end of the day, but it's an amazing job and you can work anywhere," she said. "It can be very heartbreaking at times because they're not all Braydons. They're not all Braydon's family. They're not all kids who are progressing."

"One little girl in particular, I've worked with her for over two years and she's just now saying a word. I mean, sometimes you just want to bang your head against the wall, and it's not them and it's not you, it just happens."

### Making progress

Peggy can't believe how much progress her son has made in such a short time. She says there are things that she can't even remember happened until someone reminds her.

"If you would have talked to me a year ago, I would have been in tears at this



**Braydon holds on tight while playing outside. Swinging was a fear Braydon overcame.**

point because it was so bad," Peggy said.

"After school every day for two hours he would lay in the floor and beat his head on the floor and scream and bawl. It got to the point I dreaded picking him up, which is a sad feeling not even wanting to go pick your baby up."

Children with autism like deep pressure.

For a long time, Braydon wore a pressure vest made of a neoprene material with Velcro.

"I don't know what it actually did for him, but the moment we took it off he was a wild man again, and the moment we put it back on, he just walked around like a calm, mellow child," Peggy said.

"He's now out of that, and we donated it to the school for another child."

Stemming is one thing autistic children do. It's when they line things up or sort

### "It can be very heartbreaking at times because they're not all Braydons."

things in a very structured pattern.

"I didn't think he stemmed at first," she said.

"I went to Wal-Mart and bought him these little teddy bear beads, and he wasn't even 2 yet. I walked out of the room to put the groceries away and walked back into the room and he had all the purple teddy bears in a line and all the yellow. That's when we realized he does stem because children at that age don't put their colors together."

With autism, structure and routine are an important factor in everyday life. If the family has to go somewhere unexpectedly everyone must prepare Braydon for the outing.

"An hour, or two, or three before we even go to Wal-Mart, we're telling him where we are going and what we are going to do, and there usually aren't any stops in between, because he doesn't like that," Peggy said.

Things out of the ordinary are difficult for people with autism. Braydon must have the same bedtime routine every night, or he won't go to sleep.

"He has this frog that has to have its head crammed between the railing of his crib, his cup in the exact same spot every night, and you have to tell him how many blankets you're putting on him," Peggy said.

"Otherwise, he won't go to bed. If we do the exact same thing every night though, we'll shut his door and not hear anything out of him."

Dinnertime is another very structured



**Braydon pulls out his Hot Wheels carrying case and is ready to play.**

detail in young Braydon's life.

"He used to always want potato chips and pizza," Peggy said. "But we've got him to where we sit down and everyone's plate looks the same. Even if we don't want to eat it, we still have it there."

Braydon's two big sisters have been there through all the vests, brushing and therapies.

"They put up with a lot of hitting and hair pulling," Peggy said. "We're probably easier on him about the behavioral issues. That might be part of his problem, because there's constant screaming and hitting, and he's very strong willed. Stuff that the girls can't get away with, he does because it makes our lives easier."

### Hoping for the best

Braydon's family has learned a lot about autism since his diagnosis.

"There is no cause and no cure for autism," Peggy said. "But they're hoping with enough therapies he might have his diagnosis turned around or dismissed from his records. I would hate for that to follow him all the way through if he's OK."

Braydon has had so much support throughout his journey. With continued therapies, he keeps progressing.

"He's one of those children who's always anxious to work," Perkins said. "He's excited to see you and I think that being curious and engaged is a very strong positive for life."



According to legend,  
in 1936 Robert Johnson  
went down to the  
**CROSSROADS**  
and made a pact with  
the devil. The devil  
promised to fulfill his  
dreams, thus Johnson  
traded his eternal soul  
for his extraordinary  
musical talents. Of  
course, the devil would  
not allow him to enjoy  
his success and soon  
claimed his prize.

here at  
**CROSSROADS**  
We don't  
want your  
soul, just  
your talent.

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# WATERED GARDENS

Story by Cameron Bohannon  
Photos by Christine Thrasher

## Couple devotes time and energy to meet community needs.

In a makeshift office halfway partitioned from a room crowded with kitchen stoves, furniture, teeming racks of second-hand clothing and toddler toys, Marcia Whitford sits in the hub of a bustling ministry that incidentally began on her front porch.

Whitford and her husband James are co-directors of Watered Gardens, a Joplin-based volunteer organization that provides assistance to low-income and otherwise disadvantaged individuals.

Four years ago, Whitford was clueless as to where her willingness to help others would lead, she was simply sharing her resources with neighbors.

"People just stood literally knocking on my door," Whitford said.

She lived in northwest Joplin, where many in her neighborhood had fallen on hard times and were in various forms of need.

Whitford helped where she could by giving them rides to work, food, baby formu-

la and advice, but it wasn't long until the demand outran the supply.

"It was just wild," she said.

It came to the point where Whitford got five to six telephone calls at all hours of the day.

She thought it was more than she could handle, but was compelled to keep helping.

"It was like God just kind of moved and put me in these situations," Whitford said.

During that time, Whitford married James, and the couple sought out a way to meet the needs of others on a grander scale.

As they thought and prayed for a solution, it became clear that they should rely on the Christian community for help: not just one church or denomination, but a pooling of resources from as many churches as were willing to help.

Soon, area churches pitched in and a large building was leased and donations



**Watered Gardens is an oasis for individuals in need of help and support.**

began quickly flowing in.

James Whitford got the idea to call the ministry "Watered Gardens" while reading the book of Isaiah: "... and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." Isaiah Ch. 58 v. 10-11, NIV.)

Today the Whitford's are joined by a database full of volunteers who provide assistance to the needy via transportation, lawn care, cleaning, meal preparation and even computer maintenance.

Pamela Corkle, personal care coordinator at Watered Gardens, said though most clients need help because they are homeless or poor, others may be unable to perform certain tasks due to old age, blindness, or a temporary injury.

"A lot of need comes through the door," Corkle said.

When individuals ask Watered Gardens



**Mark Kiefer, volunteer at Watered Gardens, makes telephone calls to acquire needed donations. He is one of many who help in the day-to-day business at Watered Gardens.**





It takes many different people to allow Watered Gardens to be the helping hand that it has become. Volunteers work around the clock to ensure that both the physical and spiritual needs of the people are met. Whitford stands near the center of the main floor of Watered Gardens' new location at 531 S. Kentucky while volunteers help prepare the building for service.

for assistance, Corkle draws from the database to find a willing volunteer who has the means to meet that person's specific need.

"There's a blessing that comes in helping others," Marcia Whitford said. "A blessing for the takers and the givers."

"The volunteer help is awesome," she said. "They're wonderful people that have given of their time and talent."

James Whitford said what separates Watered Gardens from many other church-affiliated charities is its freedom from denominational ties.

"We really view ourselves as an outreach

of the local city church," he said, rather than an extension of one church. "We need to be able to work together."

James emphasized that it is when many churches pool resources to rally around a common cause in the community that the greatest impact is made.

Watered Gardens is different from other homeless and low-income charities in that it requires no commitments, such as being sober, for people to receive help.

Marcia said they are ok with individuals who want to take advantage of the material items Watered Gardens has to offer without getting other help, such as budget

planning or spiritual and emotional counseling, but that in those situations only so much can be done until the charity has nothing left to offer.

"There are times when we can't help if people aren't willing to be helped," she said.

Though Watered Gardens does provide materially for the low-income and homeless, the goal is to reach individuals on a spiritual level.

"We feel like if they are not in a right relationship with God, we're just sticking a Band-Aid on the problem," Marcia said.

"And though it is good to help with food,



diapers and other items, the organization is not helping if it's not making an "eternal difference."

Mike Pettengill goes to Watered Gardens on a weekly basis to use the telephone, but said the greatest benefit is the "comforting feeling" he gets there from the friendship of Marcia and others.

"It's been a blessing to be uplifted," he said. "It keeps my spirits high."

After Pettengill had a stroke in December 2002, he depended on the volunteers at Watered Gardens for transportation to and from doctor visits. Now recovering, he appreciates the way his friends show support.

"It's awesome to know somebody is in prayer for what I'm going through," he said.

Marcia gave the account of another local who benefited spiritually from the outreach. When the woman contacted Watered Gardens she was on drugs and suffering from paranoia.

"She was too plagued with fear and anxiety to even leave her house," Marcia said.



**Dave Ballew, volunteer, arranges a television set on a moving platform. Ballew dedicates his time and energy to deliver many different donations that benefit others.**



**Marcia Whitford spends much of her time on the telephone conducting Watered Gardens' business. She uses this time to receive donations and search among her network for the much needed supplies that are not always donated.**

"She was just a mess."

After material assistance from the charity led to opportunities for spiritual counseling and encouragement, the woman began to turn her life around. She is now drug free and carries on a normal life.

Marcia said people need spiritual security more than financial or any other form of stability, even for her clients, most of who are homeless or have very low-incomes.

"I think society has a way of summing someone up if they aren't 'important,' but they are important. We're all important," she said.

Though Watered Gardens is making a difference in the community, Corkle said she sees more need in the community than there are organizations to meet it, and help in any form is appreciated.

David Ballew, Watered Gardens volunteer and junior Theater major at Missouri Southern, volunteers at least one day a week and said more help could certainly be used at the ministry.

Ballew learned about the organization through his church and decided to get involved while he was "driving around one day and felt prompted to do it."

Others may volunteer through their churches or by contacting Watered Gardens directly at 623-6030.





# A Marriage Around the World

Story by Jerry Manter

Photos by Christine Thrasher

## Instructors share passion for travel, teaching and monkeys?

At first glance, Dr. Gwen Murdock and Dr. John Couper appear like many happily married couples do.

They give each other light public displays of affection, make one another smile and love spending time together.

But while taking a trip down memory lane with Gwen and John on the back and bumpy roads of Cuba, it's easy to see their story together is nothing but out of the ordinary.

Even how they met for the first time draws interesting response.

"We were attending a lecture on orangutans in Atlanta," Gwen said with smile.

Whether it was fate or just a chance meeting, a professor introduced the two

together because they shared a common interest in wooly monkeys.

With attraction, respect for one another and an urge to study animals and travel the world, John and Gwen knew they had something special. They married in 1983.

It just made perfect sense.

Dr. John Couper, communications professor at Pittsburg State University, has always been an avid traveler. But when Couper travels the world he makes sure he experiences his traveling adventures to the fullest extent.

He's spent time in 54 countries throughout his life and continues to cross into new borders every year. Couper finds the world fascinating and thrives off his experiences.

Just spending time in third-world countries offers him perspective on life. He does his best to learn the root of as many languages as possible. While studying in Africa, he picked up Swahili, a challenging language found in Tanzania.

"I expected myself to adapt to their culture," John said.

He lived in Africa as a teenager and lived in homes built out of mud. For many years, he's lived without electricity. But that never bothered him.

"It's very easy to adapt," he said. "I was always comfortable in other cultures."

For Dr. Gwen Murdock, psychology professor at Missouri Southern, it's always been a dream of hers to work, study and





Submitted Photo

**Gwen Murdock, far right, stands in front of her collapsed truck in the middle of African jungle lands. Stranded along with Murdock include her husband John Couper, her son Jo, and family friend Melissa Baker. The couple has endured many similar adventures while travelling.**

travel. And when Gwen was given the opportunity to study in Tanzania at the same time John was, she jumped at the chance.

Gwen followed her love of animals to Mikumi National Park, which was deep in the wild African frontier. John was in the remote village of Ilakala.

"On the weekends, we would visit each other," Gwen said.

Gwen spent many dry and hot African sunny days studying the local animals. At night it was easy to hear the distant cries of a herd of lions or elephants.

"I loved living in the park," she said. "It was one of the most wonderful experiences."

Although together they've explored the world, one of their most memorable experiences came from their time in Tanzania. Their son Jo and his girlfriend visited John and Gwen for an African adventure.

The four of them left civilization for a short excursion into the bush. It was in the middle of the African rainy season and many of the dirt roads were caked with heavy mud.

In the worst location possible, which was in the middle of nowhere, their vehicle fell victim to the mud. The car wasn't going anywhere.

"We were stuck with no food," Gwen

said. "The girlfriend was hysterical."

For an entire day, the four were stranded on the side of the road not having seen one car. And then the second day — nothing.



**Couper and Murdock acquired many kinds of souvenirs during their exotic travels.**

"After the second day, we decided no one was coming," she said.

John and Jo made the decision to begin walking and look for help. Both were hungry, delusional and managed to quench a painful thirst by drinking muddy water in

the cracks of the dirt road. The two walked 20 miles with a temperature outside easily more than 100 degrees.

John thought he saw tents a short distance away. But the tents were large rocks.

"I couldn't go anymore, I was hallucinating," he said. "I started yelling at rocks."

The women were back at the vehicle waiting for answers.

"I told Jo's girlfriend that John and Jo probably met up with some rich women," she said.

Gwen was willing to do anything to lighten the mood. After three long days, a vehicle approached and pulled the car out of the mud. They drove ahead and eventually met up with John and Jo, who were extremely fatigued. John and Gwen were upset and frustrated about the ordeal. But they were never worried about dying.

"What ever happens will happen," Gwen said. "We knew we would be OK."

And, it's adventures such as being stuck in mud for three days under a devastating African sun that John and Gwen love.

They now are teaching in a college setting, and they enjoy what they do. But, it's times when they're out exploring the world, when they're truly happy.

"The world is so incredibly rich," Gwen said.





Story by Brandon Nivens  
Photos by Christine Thrasher

## Local bands find ways to unleash talent and showcase their intensity in Joplin.

Some musicians strive to create pleasant music that is enjoyed by those in the mainstream. Others prefer to annihilate the eardrums with sounds of chaos and disarray. Is either one better than the other? Or is it just a matter of opinion?

The Midwest offers a variety of music for diverse groups of people. The rest of the country may have a stereotypical image of Midwesterners as down-home folk with traditional values. This is true for some, but definitely not for all. Local musicians have proven this stereotype false by offering different styles of music

for their supporters. The mix of local music includes, but is not limited to: country, rock, pop-rock, heavy metal, experimental, punk-rock, alternative, acid-jazz, funk, etc. Perhaps music is as diverse here as it is in New York or Los Angeles.

The national music acts that tour across the country, and make tens-of-thousands-of-dollars per show, all had to start somewhere. Most of them started playing shows locally and gradually spread their music nationally, whether it was by touring for 11 months out of the year or by being recognized by a major label, who then promoted

them throughout the nation. There are many ways that local bands can make it big; the only problem is that most don't. The competition in the music industry is as fierce as any other high-paying job, perhaps more so. Bands can oftentimes lose track of their inspiration for starting a band in the first place. The lack of venues for local musicians can also be frustrating.

### Peacechurch

A wall of speakers is the backdrop for local heavy-rock band Peacechurch's practice area. Located inside a recycling center



in the center of Joplin, the musicians of Peacechurch seem displeased with the venue choices around town.

"Joplin offers 10 dance clubs and two bars that allow bands to play," said Jess Johnson, lead drummer for Peacechurch. "Of those two bars, only one will allow our type of music. If your band plays cover songs then you can play about anywhere and make \$200-300 a night."

"People around here want to hear music that they already know," said Arundell Overman, singer/guitarist for the band. "Playing original local music is a chance you have to take. Some of the best shows we've played locally have been privately held parties. If you want recognition locally you have to know other bands, put up a lot of fliers, and give good performances."

"Sometimes you may play for only three people, but you might see those people at your next show," said Amiel Overman, bassist for Peacechurch. "And those people will bring more people."

### Freak Flag

Freak Flag, an experimental rock band from Joplin, has been recording its music since 1994 and began playing live shows as a full band in 2001. Seated in the living room of Mike Jilge's home, with an image of Jimi Hendrix on the front wall and a stack of speakers blocking the entrance to the kitchen, three of the five members of Freak Flag shared some insight into the local music scene.

Doug Dicharry, drummer and keyboardist for Freak Flag, said he liked live performances, because they were "intense and linear."

"Playing music live is fun by-the-seat-of-your-pants," he said.

"The audience gets the big picture that you're trying to project, and it doesn't stop for anything, unless you blow up your equipment."

"The main thing about playing music is having fun and seeing the look on people's faces as they watch you," said Jilge, bassist and percussionist.

Jilge said the key to keeping a band together was being honest with one another and being good friends. Staying away from dramatic situations and arguments also keeps the musical process moving smoothly.

"Being in a band is like having four other girlfriends," Dicharry said. "You have to

call and see if they're OK all the time."

Playing music has taken top priority in Dicharry's life.

"I'll play music until I'm broke and begging on the side of the street," he said. "I don't care, because it's really a win-win situation when you play live music. You get something out of it and so does the audience."

"If you have different sounding music, it's really hard to get gigs around here," said Gene Herbert, saxophonist and bassist for Freak Flag.

The band agreed that in order to find shows, a band has to have a CD of its music and talk to different venues.



Drummer Doug Dicharry works up a sweat while playing during a live Freak Flag performance.

"Anyone can back their own tour," Jilge said. "They can just find band members that they can stand to be with in a bus for a month."

### Jenkins Dirt

Jenkins Dirt plays Contemporary Rock and has been together three years. The band frequents the music scene by playing locally and outside of the state.

"Playing in front of people is a definite rush," said Clay Stark, guitarist and singer. "Playing live, you don't have to do anything the same as the time before. You can improvise as the show goes on, and that has to do with the crowd and how they're reacting to the music. Last time we played in Fayetteville, Arkansas, we had people coming up on stage and singing *Satisfaction* with us."

Jenkins Dirt believes people don't realize how much work is involved with the music business, even if it is just doing a free show or a benefit.

"Communication is the key," Stark said. "If there are any problems, you have to talk about it. If you don't, that will just cause conflicts down the road. If you want to succeed, you have to treat it like a business, but at the same time, it has to be fun, or you won't want to continue putting out all the effort it takes."

Securing a show at a local venue involves talking to the owner and supplying a good promotional pack.

"We have promotional packs that contain

a CD, picture, bio, copies of everything that has ever been printed about us, and contact numbers that we send out to a lot of different out-of-town venues," Stark said. "Playing shows with other local bands can also help. They might be playing somewhere you haven't played yet."

### Frail

While watching the local band Frail perform, a person might get the idea that these guys are intimidating and a little bit scary. The singer lurked around the stage, hunched over as if he were going to pounce the audience at any moment. He glared into the eyes of everyone he could make contact with, and then began chanting, "Peace and quiet when the bottom drops out." The audience began chanting the same. The drummer stood up and



began to scream at the audience. The audience screamed back. Off stage, it became apparent that this band is passionate about playing its music, perhaps because of some life-threatening circumstances that have happened recently to singer Chad Terry and bassist Kevin William. Terry described how the band chose the name Frail.

"On my part kidney failure and on Kevin's part coughing up a lung," Williams said. "Literally, he lost half a lung because he coughed one day. That's why we had Mike Jilge playing bass for us at our first show."

The band formed because drummer Brian Mays saw a flier looking for a drummer at Big Don's Music City, 15th and Main streets, Joplin, and had heard that bands should "never turn down an opportunity to play." The band developed into what it is today because of one flier and some social networking.

Mays said he started playing drums in the first place because he got to beat the hell out of everything around him and it didn't hit back. It was a good way for him to release rage and aggression.

Guitarist Arik Brunk first began writing poetry then decided that it was more fun putting poetry to music. Guitarist Shannon Low starting playing music in fifth grade because there was a "hot chick" in band class. Unfortunately, the girl dropped out the next day, and his mother made him stay in the band class. Terry's mother sang, and he learned that as he grew older, there was a song for everything.

"Music was a way for me to get my own personal emotion out, whether it be happy, sad, pissed, horny, or whatever really," he said.

The band describes the "vicious cycle" of playing music as a "giant feedback loop of direct energy transfer from the band to the audience."

"When the five of us click on stage it's beautiful," Terry said. "It's really bad, though, when you put your heart and soul out there for the taking, and you get the complete opposite back."

Frail believes that some venues around the Joplin area have trained their customers to sit and listen instead of getting up and becoming an active part of the music.

"You know they want to get up and get crazy, but that's the feel of the place," Terry said.



Saxophonist Gene Herbert gives a creative performance along with his band, Freak Flag.

Frail thinks the general public reacts horribly to local music. Terry sat forward with disgust.

"It's not even about the music anymore," he said. "It's about how popular you can be on MTV. Half the major bands now get on stage and play along with a CD. People pay to go see this, and it's ridiculous. Local bands still remember what it's like to fight your ass off and basically play for free because you enjoy it. Local bands still have the passion and not the dollar signs. Whereas, the national acts have the contract writers who get them all white dressing rooms, with all white furniture and all white flowers."

"You have to have a certain attitude on stage because that's what people come to see, but you can't let it carry over off-stage," Terry said. "Put on a good show, but remember that you're not Kiss. All the people in the crowd are there to support you, so treat them like that."

"Give them the show they paid for and then thank them," Mays said.

### Local rock show

Many local bands thank Bill Connor and Steve Lanyon for the Local Rock Show on 105.3 FM that they DJ from 8 to 10 p.m. on Wednesday nights. Many bands visit Connor and Lanyon, and from the multitude of cars outside the station, the impression is given that there really is a music scene in Joplin. On any Wednesday night, a wide variety of local musicians will be standing outside the radio station, patient-

ly waiting their turn to talk on the radio about new music or upcoming shows. There are many musical genres presented outside and inside the station. This is a good way for various local bands to meet one another and share comments on the current local scene.

"There is nothing that is more proof of the creativity of the local music scene, than when bands are actually performing," Lanyon said. "I like the raw fury and intensity of a live performance."

Lanyon is a big believer in the Independent Record system.

"In the time that it takes a major label to release one record for a band, an Indie label could have released two records and got the band out to support at least one of those records," he said. "And if you're a good live band, you're going to build a fan base while on the road."

"For some reason, many people think that it's not possible for a local act to be as good as a national act. That seems really shortsighted to me, because all those national acts were local at one point to somebody. There are many national bands that are hacks."

"They're buying the style of other bands, and aren't doing anything creative. They're just doing exactly the formula that the record label is laying out for them. There are imitators on the local scene as well. I think that since in the local scene there's not money, fame and egos at stake, there's more of a chance for creativity to



Steve Lanyon listens while a local band gives a live performance for 105.3 FM.



sneak out its funky little head.”

The local show on 105.3 supports 35-40 different local artists, and tries to promote every show in the area. Individuals can access band links, message forums and a concert calendar at [www.joplinrock.com](http://www.joplinrock.com).

### **The Sound and the Fury**

Various bands based out of larger cities also frequent the Joplin music scene. This helps add variety and competition for the local Joplin musicians. One local band that plays in Joplin monthly, and pulls in hundreds of people for its shows, is The Sound and the Fury. The band can be described as a straight up hard rock band based in Kansas City, and it has been together for seven years.

“You have to make a lot of sacrifices,” said Jeff Wood, singer and guitarist for the group, “Sometimes the other things in life that we all take pleasure in, including family, friends and loved ones, take a back seat to what we’re trying to achieve.”

Drummer Nathan Russell said becoming recognized nationally as musicians has to do with being in the right place at the right time.

“The Internet has been a great tool in gaining publicity nationally as well as internationally,” Russell said.

“One of the best things about being from the U.S. is that we dominate the world music scene, and a lot of eyes are on our country.”

“Either win the lottery or get signed to a label that is willing to promote you and not just use you as a tax write-off,” Wood said.

Achieving a contract with a major record label according to Wood is, “50 percent luck and 50 percent preparation.”

“Some bands are just at the right place at the right time and some bands work really hard to make sure they are at the right place at the right time,” he said. “Some of the best bands who do not get promoted properly will probably fail next to an average band that is promoted well.”

Supporting local music is as simple as going to the shows and encouraging the bands. The musicians on stage, for the most part, are not there to make money or become rock stars.

They’re there because they enjoy projecting their emotions through music to an audience that will connect with them and remember them.

# **Local Bands Web sites and Information**

[www.joplinrock.com](http://www.joplinrock.com)

[www.thescatter.com](http://www.thescatter.com)

[www.iuma.com](http://www.iuma.com)

[www.getsigned.com](http://www.getsigned.com)

[www.localband.net](http://www.localband.net)

[www.localband.com](http://www.localband.com)

[www.golistenlive.net](http://www.golistenlive.net)

[www.garageband.com](http://www.garageband.com)

[www.homegrownmusic.net](http://www.homegrownmusic.net)

[www.taxi.com](http://www.taxi.com)



While the football soared through the air toward quarterback Kokain Mothershed, the crowd jumped as if pulled by invisible threads.

Screaming voices and clapping hands seemed to compete against the rhythmical drum beats projected by the musicians.

"Defense, defense!" the crowd shouted together.

Yellow shirts detailed with dark green lettering identified them as loyal fans of Missouri Southern football. A group of spirited students were ready to release their energy at the Homecoming football game.

Robert Moss, senior public relations major, helped promote Southern community spirit.

"It's exciting to be part of a team and a group at a college and now a university," Moss said. "Pumping up with a team, pumping up the players ... even after I graduate it will be a lot of excitement to see the Missouri Southern football team."

Josh Young, junior criminal justice major, stood proud in a cowboy hat, gloves, a 1988 pair of coaching shorts, and knee-high yellow socks. Though the view through his gold-shaded sunglasses looked meek after the second half of the game, it did not hinder him from cheering on his favorite men in green.

"We're here to support our favorite team," Young said. "We come out and support our athletic clubs. Right now it is football season; we're helping to support them and maybe get them hyped up a little bit more to start winning."

Having played for the Southern team last year, James W. Harris, senior criminal justice major, has his own motivations for cheering at football games.

"The reason I go is because I played football last year and I understand what it takes to be a student athlete," Harris said. "I liked the support of my fans. I don't do anything too crazy, because I really don't have that much school spirit. I just wear my usual clothes and I scream as loud as I can whenever they make a big play."



# LAST

## LINE OF DEFENSE





(Above) Clayton Cunningham, center, cheers on the players during the football Homecoming game. Cunningham shows his Southern spirit by dressing in coaching shorts and green T-shirts at the games. Gang Green has provided an outlet for letting loose school pride.  
(Left) Cliff Erwin covers himself in green body paint and a cape at each home football game to display his energetic support for the team.

Story by Alice Hossain  
Photos by Andy Tevis

Loyal fans convey pure enthusiasm for the love of the game.



Fans with Southern logos stuck to their excited blushed cheeks rallied together their enthusiasm. With green-golden wisps skillfully plaited in their hair, female football fans began screaming for their team.

"Go, Southern, go."

The stakes are definitely high and who knows better than senior mass communications major and Southern quarterback Kokain Mothershed?

For him, winning or losing is not a question of life or death, but one of being loyal or letting the team down. It is because of this that the student fans are so important to him.

"They always stay behind us," Mothershed said.

"They bring a lot of spirit to the fans and to the team. Whether we win, lose or draw they are always going to be there supporting us, and that's what we need."

Jordan Ousley, freshman business major, is also a part of Southern's football team. He echoed Mothershed's appreciation of fan loyalty.

"I'm on the football team, and I think the fans are great for supporting us, even though we haven't had the best season," he said. "The Gang Green club is pretty cool, the way they dress up. The other fans are nice, too, but we need more fans, because our stadium is still not filled up."

But sometimes it is quality and not quantity that counts. As a senior college football player, Mothershed has seen his share of wild fan support.

"The craziest thing I have ever seen was in Gang Green," Mothershed said.

"I've seen a whole body painted, I mean a whole green man. It kind of freaked me out when I saw him."

Cliff Erwin, senior mass communications and German major,

was the green man. He paints himself every home game with washable green paint. He completely covers his hair and face, as well as the rest of his body.

"I do it because it is my senior year, and I wanted to do something unique," Erwin said.

"I paint my whole body green, and I have a Southern cape made out of one of the flags. It's just a lot of fun, and I think I get a lot of people into it."

One 6-year-old stared fascinated at Erwin punching his oversized rubber Hulk fists. Looking down at his overall green body, he smiled when thinking about returning to life as a regular Southern student fan again.

"I'm going to take probably about 10 showers and hopefully most of it will come off," Erwin said.

Removing the dried green paint from his skin doesn't mean he's washing off his enthusiasm. He supports his team in good as well as in hard days.

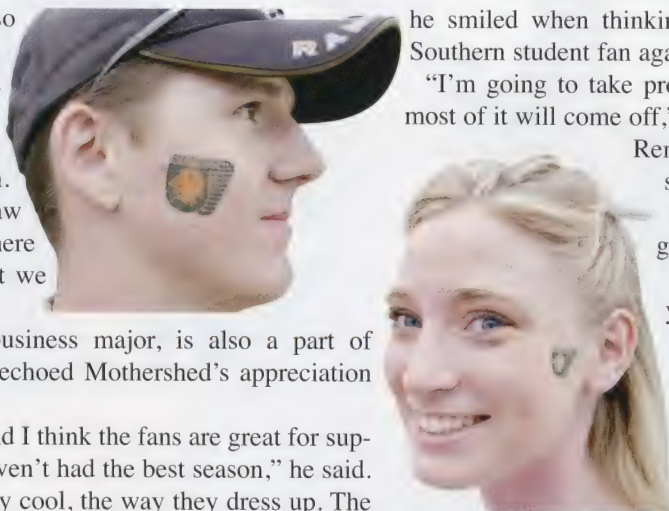
"It's frustrating, but there are on and off years," Erwin said. "I'm a Philadelphia fan, and we stick by our team. We've gone through many rough seasons. I'm not one of those people who just jump on the bandwagon. I still go to Missouri Southern games even if they lose."

Courtney Martin, junior nursing major, is another fan who tried to be positive after Southern's Homecoming loss. As a cheerleader, she knows how to cope when the team is struggling. This time acrobatic twists, human pyramids and turning somersaults did not help the team to victory, but they did help boost the crowd's excitement.

"I think that it's important to support your team," Martin said.

During the years she has developed her own self-encouraging tactics. Cheerleading played an important role in doing so.

"We have to keep ourselves up," Martin said. "Cheering is very self-motivating. You keep yourself up to help keep the fans up."



(Right) Eric Griffin uses his bull horn at the Homecoming game to cheer on the team. (Above) Steven Wolven and Courtney Martin display Southern pride on their cheeks. (Far right) Southern fans support the team during the Homecoming football game.












# *Taking a break ... Surfer Style*

Surfers in Australia are stoked to ride the break and use surfing as a ministry in the beach culture.

Story by Kristen Smith





A brilliant golden glow from the rising sun reached its arms from beneath the ocean as she pressed her forehead to the car window.

Struggling to see past the blur of houses and trees, she watches as the sun reveals the blanket of morning surf sweeping into the beach. Good Charlotte rang over the speakers in an effort to drown out the sound of the surfboard bags flapping overhead. The punk group never sounded so good.

"It's weird. When I'm in the ocean or looking out over it I feel like I'm one with him, like he's so near to me," said 16-year-old Heidi Farley. "I guess it's that sense of respect and freedom that I feel that keeps me coming back."

"Sometimes when I look out over the surf I feel terrified, because I know the power that the ocean possesses and I feel so insignificant to it all. But God is near and sometimes it takes my breath away at just how beautiful and perfect his creation is."



The powdery beaches of Queensland, Australia stretch across the Eastern Coast for more than 35 miles. A large portion of the world's best surfing beaches lay within the borders of Queensland's Gold Coast. From South Stradbroke Island all the way down the coast to Duranbuh, outsiders find themselves immersed in a surf culture like nothing seen through the eyes of Hollywood.

"Surfing is definitely a kind of lifestyle that's open to everyone. You don't have to fit a certain mold and it's based on who you are, so be it," said 16-year-old Sammy Franke. "To be that carefree and mellow is an amazing gift that surfing, as a sport, has to offer. It is something that a lot of people wish they had."

Many young people dedicated to the sport spend countless hours on the glittering beaches and in the breaking waves. Naturally they grow to become a part of the surf culture as they make friends with other surfers and spend more of their time on the coast.

Unfortunately, the excessive use of drugs and alcohol by surfers is also a part of this surfing subculture, and many young surfers find themselves involved in these activities.

Sharing the same love for surfing and a desire to reach out for those falling into the darker side of the subculture, Christian Surfers Australia became a national body in 1983 with the goal to "act as a bridge from the beach to the local church." The surfing ministries that started in Australia in 1976 resulted in the formation of international clubs all over the world including New Zealand, Tahiti, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Germany, Indonesia, United Kingdom, France, Portugal, and more than 20 chapters in the United States.

On the coast near the calm bay waters of Cleveland, Queensland, one can find a group of young people with a passion for God. They also share a passion for surfing and a burden for the culture that consumes so many other young surfers.

"I feel Christian Surfers is important because there are so many guys and girls in the Bayside that surf, and because they surf they feel they have to be involved with the 'typical' surfing culture of sex, drugs and alcohol just to be cool," said Troy Wegner, a core group leader in Christian Surfers Bayside. "We want to show them that you don't have to be involved in all of

that to have fun or to be cool."

Wegner's sandy blonde hair became lost in the glow of the beach while sitting on a towel. Despite his 19 years of coastal life, he was too fidgety to sit still in the fine sand of Coolangatta Beach. The sand covered his feet while sticking to his wet board shorts, and he continued to brush the gritty mess off his body. He finally decided that the best place for his tired surfer figure was in the driver's seat of his car parked near the road.

Kirk Edington resides on the Sunshine Coast and serves as the Queensland director of Christian Surfers Australia. He takes on a pastoral role over the leaders of the Bayside group.

"I came into the role of Queensland director for Christian Surfers last year in October," Edington said. "Through that, Nic Spencer knew that there were some surfers in the church that were looking to be missional in their community so he hooked it all up. Bayside Christian Surfers has actually been around for awhile in that four or five years ago. These guys have a fresh vision from God for the Bayside area."

Spencer saw a need for the group in the still bay waters of Cleveland. He encouraged the younger guys at the church to use their passion to surf for God.

"The idea was surfing and sharing their faith with their surfing mates," Spencer said. "It all made sense to get them fired up to be involved."

The next step was to find leadership for the Bayside. A calm sea breeze came in on the pontoon of Wellington Point after he explained his visionary role in the group. He easily escaped the typical Australian-guy stereotype with a glimpse of dark skin peeking out from under a long sleeve white shirt. He skipped shaving that morning and added a red beanie in order to hide a mess of dark hair.

"We got the boys together and really wanted to see if this was something that they had a heart for or something that would fall over after a month," Spencer said. "We're six months into it and we're seeing some great day trips down the coast, good fellowship and some great testimonies of things that have happened through those trips in each of the guys' lives."

Although the leadership of the group is young, ages 16 to 26, they have a vision

for the community and are enthusiastic about reaching other surfers. Cleveland's Youth and Outreach Pastor, Garry Wynn, helps the group out by making sure that their ministry aims and resource needs are met.

"Andrew Burns, Nic and now Troy are the guys that got the thing happening and are likely to remain the backbone of it for at least the short term," Wynn said. "Kirk comes down from the Sunshine Coast and meets with the guys often, and they are ultimately responsible to him."

Edington has full confidence in the group as it meets the needs of people and works on building the relationships that God's purpose for them will be reached.

"I see that there is a need to meet people's real physical needs first before we can meet their spiritual need," said Edington. "Relationship is the key. Otherwise, trust and respect are not even present. No one has the right to speak into another person's life until they first have built a friendship. Jesus always met the physical need first before addressing the spiritual need. This is something we are missing. People have needs and for some reason we as Christians keep forgetting that and just try to meet the spiritual needs. It just won't work."

Look out into the turquoise water almost any day of the year and there will be a surfer heading out. With surfing being a year-round sport in Australia, the group looks toward the many opportunities to build relationships and get others involved in the organization.

"I'd never heard about Christian Surfers but it was the kind of thing that I'd always wished I could be involved in," Franke said. "The surfers and skaters are the people I really relate to and watching them live without knowing something bigger is tough. Being on the outside for a long time makes it easy to see that people aren't necessarily interested in huge acts of kindness but more just sincere small ones."

Her 5-foot-4 figure can frequently be found on the beach, resembling one of the women from the MTV series "Surf Girls". Her surfer print decorated brown bikini top complements her dark hair pulled into a ponytail. A clear leg rope unified her and her board as she scanned the swell coming in out the back, looking for the best surf before immersing herself in the salty water.





(Previous Page) Renowned for its great surf, Kirra Beach is home of the famous surf spot, Kirra point on the Gold Coast. (Above) Trailing his hand through the water, a surfer rides the break off the shores of the Gold Coast. (Below) Surfers sit out the back at Duranbuh as they wait for swell to come in from the ocean. (Bottom Right) Four young surfers make their way off the beach in hopes of catching a wave on the big breaks sweeping in.







"Surfers travel this amazing old world of ours searching and riding these amazing swells that come from the deep and land on beaches, reefs, points, headlands and bombies all over the world," Edington said. "Imagine if we were to impact even half of the Australian surfing community with the love of Christ. Then we send them with the Great Commission found in the Gospels of Mathew and Mark. That is God's hope and purpose for Christian surfers in Australia, the USA, Brazil, New Zealand, UK, Indonesia, Europe, et cetera . . . and of course for Bayside Christian Surfers as well. That is what I hope to see."

More than 80,000 surfers find their freedom in the stretch of Gold Coast beaches. As the tide began to go out after a couple hours of surf, the Christian Surfers

emerged from the powerful waters, tow-eled off, gave their board a rinse and headed to Maccas (McDonalds) for a late brekky.

Giving up the fight to keep her wavy blonde hair out of her eyes, Farley let the sea breeze take her thoughts.

Watching the surfers being consumed by the white water, she knew better than to believe they were in control of the surf while sliding down the break. She longed for these surfers to allow God to take control of their lives and fill them with the relationship she lives and breathes for.

*Special thanks to Adam Weathered for the use of his photographs. Weathered is a professional photographer and resides on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia. He can be contacted at adamweathered@hotmail.com.*

## Going Surf Chic Down Under

Column by Kristen Smith

There's no way I can possibly sum up my summer in Australia in a couple of paragraphs. As John Mayer sings: "Maybe I will tell you all about it when I'm in the mood to lose my way with words."

I need to confess something first off. I have this weird desire for constant change that often gives my family gray hair. No complaints, it's a gift from God and he gave me the most incredible 68 days of my life.

I would spend these days working with youth and children's programs and teaching Religious Education courses through Cleveland Baptist Church in the beautiful Cleveland Bay of Queensland Australia. Raising my own money to go proved to be a blessing, and the International Mission Board organized my placement in Australia. Another last minute blessing came about a week before my departure. With the help of my adviser, we found a way for my time overseas to count toward internship credit needed to graduate.

I left with no expectations, except to see kangaroo and koala (didn't plan on seeing them smushed on the side of the road), and possibly Steve Erwin as Liz was hoping (saw Steve as well). My goal was to keep a servant's heart as I worked with the church and to build relationships. I wanted this to be a learning experience and I was not disappointed.

I found my inner "coasty." There is something enchanting about the coastal

life and Australian beaches. Never had I pictured myself in a rashie with a leg rope strapped to my ankle and a board under my arm, anticipating the cool sting of the salt water on my body.

Straddling the board, I would sit and watch the swell coming in, waiting for the set that I wanted to try. It drew me closer to God. People often don't understand what kind of relationship God wants to have with us. I felt him there with me, telling me which set to try for. The waves felt like his hands cradling me, pushing me along.

My prayer life improved during my surf encounters as I often got a little too brave with the big swell. Ignoring the shouts of my surfing mates warning me that I was about to get mauled by a wave wasn't one of my finer moments. I would find myself underwater, covering my head, waiting for the reassuring tug on the leg rope and praying that the board wouldn't crash down on top of me.

I learned how to live. I wasn't a tourist ... throw another shrimp on the barbie, I was Aussie! Living life alongside three families, I now have knowledge of the country and culture that many tourists never experience.

So here I am, back in the States and still a little confused at times about which side of the road to drive on. My family and friends go along with my theory that I'm an Aussie surf chic, put up with my new lingo and love me in spite of it.



# Living for Laughs

Story by Kayla Rinker  
Photos by Andy Tevis

Comic Dan Ellison  
measures success  
by laughter rates,  
not life insurance.

After warming up the audience with raw humor and corny jokes, the 60-something emcee received a polite, but brief, applause. Smoke began to infiltrate the air yet again, and the strong aroma of perfume, whiskey and sweat saturated everything it touched.

The clan of comedy lovers spoke loudly inside their small, circle-table clusters while they waited for the premier comedian to appear on stage. In the next room, Dan Ellison paced back and forth with wild-eyed anticipation. Ellison is not a stranger to the club scene. He and his "partner in crime," a fierce but lovable Doberman named Elvis, have traveled across America in an attempt to try to change the world one show at a time.

"I am an educated redneck," Ellison said soon before he made his way on stage. "I am the perfect contradiction. I watch Nascar religiously, and I follow politics. My comedy revolves around everything from parabolic curves to my raggedy old RV."

Born and raised on a farm in Parkersburg, West Virginia, Ellison's life started out nowhere near the weekend glamour and late nights of stand up comedy. Majoring in electrical engineering, Ellison graduated from Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio.

Stand up comedian Dan Ellison uses his "educated redneck" theories to entertain audiences.



Ellison worked 18 years as an electrical engineer until he decided making almost \$70,000 a year at a "good job with benefits" just wasn't enough.

"I got hooked on the worst drug in the world — comedy," he said. "The best part is that I work my two hours in the evenings and don't have to deal with everyone else's crap the rest of the day."

Unfortunately, his wife of 13 years was not supportive of his surprising career change. They divorced soon after he made his break into standup.

"She said she married an engineer, not a comedian," he said. "She took the breast implants I paid for and left with the kids three months after I quit my job."

Now Ellison and his only friend Elvis travel the countryside making people laugh. Recently the duo drove from Hastings, Nebraska, to perform three nights at Sir Laugh a Lots Comedy Club in Springfield, Missouri.

"We try to bring in a wide variety of comedians from all comedy styles," said Shelly Hanson, director of comedy at Sir Laugh A Lots. "Dan Ellison appeals to many people in this area with his common sense rantings and Southern drawl. Other favorite comedians who have appeared at our club include Raven, the erotic hypnotic; Chuck Booms; Tim Wilson; and Bob Zaney."

Wearing a denim shirt, beat-up jeans and brown healed boots, Ellison entered the stage to an enthusiastic crowd. On stage he looks about 5-foot-10 with a shaggy head of dirty blonde hair. He has two small silver hoop earrings adorning his left ear and a fading tattoo peaking just past his right arm shirtsleeve. The audience was rolling with laughter after only his first few punch lines.

"If George Carlin is on stage, he is so well-known you already know he is funny," Ellison said. "Sure, some of the audience might have heard of me. But for the most part, the first five or 10 minutes of the comedy bit is the comedian making sure the audience realizes that they are funny."

Ellison's act has changed dramatically since his first few gigs back in December 1988. He said the first time he performed was at a Virginia tavern called Friar Tuck's in front of a tough crowd of college students and sailors.

"I'm not kidding, the only reason I per-





formed that night was because of two pitchers of beer and a dare,” Ellison said. “It was not even a year and a half after that, and I was going to comedy shows, talking to entertainment directors and writing stuff down everywhere and at all times trying to put my act together.”

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**“If I had money, I would still live with my dog in an RV. Of course, it would be a much nicer RV.”**

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The plethora of experience and knowledge Ellison has gained over the years has given him a real understanding regarding his own attributes and the comedy business as a whole.

“Every comic goes through stages,” he said. “First the comedian is nervous, then less nervous, comfortable and finally real comfortable. You will never get real comfortable if you or your audience doesn’t believe in you.”

He said a comedian can only begin to work on performance material after he or she reaches the proper relaxed and contented point of his or her career.

“For the first three to five years you find out where you are and who are,” Ellison said. “I went through a stage where I wore suits and loud shirts, but I have discovered that I work best in blue jeans and boots. I know who I am and people know who I am pretty much before I say a word.”

Finding success in the world of comedy has much to do with being at the right place at the right time. However, Ellison said “who you know” is probably the most important factor in making it to the big time.

“Look at Eddie Murphy or the cast of ‘Saturday Night Live,’” he said. “When Eddie Murphy made it, he pulled all his friends there with him. Of course, the more typical way to make it in this business is to work stand up for 10 or 15 years. Before I get a big break, I have just got to open doors for myself and hope something great will happen for me.”

As Ellison finished his comedic act talking about technology’s role in making people stupid and the multitude of “scum-

## The Educated Redneck’s Top 10 Rants

1. People who sue others because of their own stupid mistakes and the “scum-sucking lawyers” who waste our hard earned tax dollars trying to defend them.
2. Police officers who make up reasons or pick a small reason to pull over law-abiding citizens. The police motto seems to have gone from “protect and serve” to “collect and disturb.”
3. Parents who continually cut down and disrespect their teenage children and still gripe about their kids’ insolent and lackadaisical manners. You get respect when you give respect. It is as simple as that, folks.
4. Doctors who use health insurance as a way to charge outrageous fees for doing next to nothing regarding their patients. They charge whatever they want and people just hand over their co-pay and go on their way.
5. Anybody who thinks terrorists should be allowed civil rights. What part of terrorist don’t you understand?
6. The folks down at Nascar trying to make racing safer after Dale Earnhardt crashed. It’s racing! The only reason drivers do it and people watch it is because it is exciting and dangerous.
7. Speaking of safety, the government is trying to be our mommies and daddies. I am for safety, but not when there are laws forcing me to be safe. It’s my business, not the government’s. We are all going to die. Some of us are just going to have more fun while we are here.
8. Technology is making people stupid. Computers and cell phones are causing people to rely on them alone and to forget about the nuisances of actually thinking.
9. Rich people who can and do anything they want because they know they have the money to buy whatever result they want. Look at O.J. Simpson, Darryl Strawberry, Robert Downey, Jr. and so on.
10. Companies who consistently practice horrible consumer relations. I don’t even think these places have actually people working for them. The automated voices, though cute, have never actually helped with my problems.

sucking lawyers” across America, he uncovered his most popular performance prop. Using the sound strips found in many new children’s books, Ellison wired them onto one soundboard and hooked it into the microphone jack.

“I tell a dirty story with the story strips from books with characters from *The Little Mermaid*, Barbie and Looney Tunes,” he said. “The noises inside these books are really funny if you have a mind like mine. The end story is probably the favorite thing of my act. Trust me, if you hear it, kids’

toys will never be the same.”

After listening to Ellison’s educated redneck theories on life, kids’ toys aren’t the only things that may never be the same. His unique comedy style and witty one-liners prove his talent and showcase a long career in comedy. Ellison just takes it one show at a time.

“I could be 62 years old and living out of my RV on permanent vacation,” he said. “There are worse things. If I had money, I would still live with my dog in an RV. Of course, it would be a much nicer RV.”







# Say What?

Story by Kayla Rinker

Illustration by Brian Huntley

## When it comes to juicy gossip, are you all ears?

Only the occasional baby's cry interrupted the passionate preacher's message that Sunday morning. Charissa Larson, seated somewhere in the middle of the medium sized church, usually paid careful attention to all of her father's sermons – but not this Sunday. Her mind took her elsewhere than in the pew that day because her new boyfriend was seated next to her, and he smelled pretty good.

As they sat half-listening and half-enjoying each other's presence, the young man decided to make a move on hopeful Charissa. Slowly, very slowly, he started moving his left arm up as if to stretch. Slowly, very slowly, he eased his arm straight behind Charissa. Slowly, very slowly, he finally draped his flexed arm across the pew and around her tense shoulders.

Charissa felt like she was in heaven instead of just hearing about it in the sermon. She was on cloud nine and stayed that way until news of the "alleged arm draping" got back to her father.

"I guess somebody in the back part of the church saw me," Larson said. "It eventually got back to my dad, the preacher, that my boyfriend was playing with my bra and everything right in the middle of church. The old gossip ladies in my church took

that little romantic incident and really ran with it."

Fortunately, Larson was eventually able to explain the truth to her father and reclaim her good name among the church family. In a lot of instances involving gossip, however, the truth is never fully known and the broadcasted hurtful words can haunt a person for the rest of his or her life.

Dr. Amy Kay Cole, clinical psychologist

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**"It is a bad habit and people need to break it. Gossip is a short term boost followed by deflation."**

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and assistant professor of psychology at Missouri Southern, said two kinds of gossip exist: positive and negative.

"You use positive gossip when you are starting to form friendships and only tell a little about yourself," Cole said.

"You talk about mutual friends or acquaintances and that is your topic of conversation until you start to feel more comfortable communicating other parts of

your life with that person."

Cole admits that though positive gossip is active in everyday life, the negative forms are much more prevalent. She defines this hurtful form as an individual or a group's communication about someone as a way of elevating themselves or making themselves feel better to the inclusion of someone else.

"For example, if you say, 'aren't they a nightmare?' you are practicing bad gossip," Cole said. "However, 'aren't they a nightmare? Let's do something about it and see what is going wrong in his life and maybe we can help,' is good gossip. Gossip is negative when it doesn't serve a purpose."

Larson, senior biology major, disagrees. In her opinion, gossip can in no way be positive because of the ease in which words can be manipulated to mean something else entirely.

"There is a tone and context attached to words and something that was said totally positive and nice about somebody can be twisted around by the next person," she said.

"If you are going to say something about someone you should not mind saying it to them themselves."

Though there are numerous reasons



people choose to gossip about others, the need for social comparison ranks among the highest.

"Social comparison simply means that in order for a person to feel better about his or herself, he or she needs to dwell on the negatives in someone else's life," Cole said.

Brian Wilfong, junior secondary education major, admits to the occasional unconscious use of gossip for this purpose.

**"People who have high self-esteem and people who are not interested in hearing gossip are less likely to gossip. These people have a purpose."**

"You want to make yourself more popular and show everybody else that you know something," he said. "It is almost like it gives you some kind of edge over someone else."

Cole also said social comparison gossip provides people with the kind of information they need to feel they are not alone.

Individuals feel more accepted and likable when not focused on their own problems.

"I once heard a quote somewhere that said, 'Small minds discuss people, great minds discuss ideas,'" Cole said.

"People who have high self-esteem and people who are not interested in hearing gossip are less likely to gossip. These people have a purpose."

Another interesting characteristic of malicious gossip is its addictive nature. Whether or not a person chooses to gossip usually depends solely on who that person is communicating with.

"Sometimes we gossip more with certain people," Cole said.

"For instance, we tend to gossip more with our high school buddies.

"We enjoy talking about the most popular and most gorgeous people from our past and how they are currently not doing well."

The gang mentality surrounding gossip is what makes it so easy to get lured into. Larson sometimes wonders if it is because people gossip to be a part of things or that they gossip to be a part of a conversation.

"I've gossiped a lot unintentionally,"

Larson said. "It's that old, 'Oh, guess what I heard ...' It's not premeditated. I just wanted to join a conversation, bond with co-workers and be a part of what's going on.

"It starts with someone telling what happened or is happening this weekend, and it seems to migrate to a conversation about the boss or a chick that came in late."

The first step toward controlling the evils of gossip is the acknowledgement of what it is and what it is capable of. Recognizing that gossip is negative talk is essential.

"It is a bad habit and people need to break it," Cole said. "Gossip is a short term boost followed by deflation."

A person's continued use of gossip throughout everyday communication is a flashing sign that something is missing in their life.

The best way for gossipers to eliminate his or her malevolent tendencies is to replace whatever is missing with other topics.

"You have to see cutting out the gossip as an opportunity to focus on other things," Cole said.

Larson says she may be more conscience about gossip than other people because of her upbringing.

She recommends talking directly to people and cutting out the middleman altogether.

"Also, maybe people need to use their ears more than their tongues," Larson said. "I think you become mature that way."

## Did You Know?

According to Dr. Amy Kay Cole, professional psychologist, women generally participate in gossip more than men. There are many reasons, however, behind the gossiping tendency in women. These reasons go back a lot farther than most realize.

In the old days women had very little contact with the outside world around them. They were limited to their homes and their children, literally miles away from other families and communities. They were not given the advantages of daily interaction at work and in towns where most men were. The manual labor men underwent gave them opportunities for socialization with other men and a means to let out some of their aggression physically.

"Women were not allowed this kind of daily routine," Cole said.

"So on the rare occasions women did get together, it was usually spent 'catching up' or talking about mutual acquaintances. Women also let out their aggression using vial words and malicious forms of gossip."

Fortunately, women of today no longer have this excuse.

There are plenty of opportunities for women to talk to one another as much as every day.

Also, women can let out their aggression and eliminate unwanted stress in a much more healthier way than with gossip by staying active through sports or developing personal work out routines.





# RECESS + P.E. = TOO MUCH FUN?

Story and Photos by Christine Thrasher



## Parents and educators balance the merits of recess and P.E.

"That's not a walking zone!" shouted the P.E. teacher.

With a pained expression a student began to run again until she reached the cone that marked the walking zone while holding a hand to her side due to a cramp. There were some children running with ease and some who consistently complained, "I hate running."

A test was administered at Stapleton Elementary in April 2003. However, it was not one that could be passed by normal means.

Physical education isn't what it used to be. It's been separated from recess and now that is has, the line separating them has been growing wider every year.

"Recess is really a break kids have for free play, and in physical education we have an entire curriculum based on objectives

and skills and things to help kids be successful, healthy and learn lifelong skills," said Marilyn Alley, principal at Stapleton Elementary in Joplin.

"Education is for life. And if we can't show that what we're teaching has lifetime value, then it's difficult to defend it."

"These days kids don't get a lot of physical activity. When they go home they sit in front of the television or sit in front of their video games. We are seeing less kids physically fit at a younger age."

And it's no wonder. Children are learning technology at an ever-increasing speed. Many parents find themselves lost in the

world of technology their children are so comfortable in, such as computers, X-Box, PlayStation, MP3 players and virtual reality games. It is not uncommon for a 3-year-old to be knowledgeable in the use of a computer mouse or for an 8-year-old to be learning multiplication tables from a laptop game instead of flashcards.





Stapleton Elementary students and faculty are able to track the progress of the Fitnessgram P.E. Standards with a bulletin board. Children are taught health and fitness components to learn how to lead a healthy life from a young age.

However, technology also brings a sedentary lifestyle and a stress on acquiring the latest gadget. This isn't to say that technology is a bad thing, but certainly, it's a factor in why Alley believes physical education to be such a critical part of a child's curriculum.

"I think it's very important because the studies that are coming out are showing that students have even higher cholesterol at the elementary age," Alley said.

Marcia Ditto and Yvonne Weeks, parents of students attending Stapleton, both said recess is a vital part of the time spent at school.

"I think they learn more social skills at recess," Weeks said.

Ditto and Weeks also believe there is room for both recess and

physical education in the school system.

"I think it's important to start kids off early on," Ditto said. "Even if you have the kids be active at home, it's not the same types of activity they learn here. I think it's important that these children are exposed at an early age to more healthy types of things, to more P.E., and to different exercises."

"Mind and body work together," Weeks said. "I mean if you have a healthy body, you're going to have a healthy mind."

The children concurred. By listening to Matthew Ditto and Rachel Lazenby, fifth grade students at Stapleton Elementary, one might be surprised that physical education is not the dreaded skill-dominated class it used to be. They are not just being taught to



climb a rope or dribble a ball anymore. Along with the skills needed to participate in activities, students at Stapleton Elementary also learn what muscles are at work in those activities. Ditto and Lazenby were able to quickly identify where the triceps, biceps and quadriceps muscles are

"I just like to play games," Lazenby said, "and learn how to play them better."

"I like to be active," said Ditto. "My favorite things are the scooters."

Scooters are an obstacle course involving low plastic boards on wheels. The children lie on these scooters and use the assigned body part to maneuver their boards around the obstacle course. For the students, it is also a whole lot of fun.

"If you walk by you think they're just playing with scooters," said Darla Armstrong, physical education teacher at Stapleton. "We are actually working on upper body strength for fitness."

Most adults remember the days when the P.E. teacher just threw out the balls for the guys and girls chatting on the sidelines. Recess was considered to be enough and there was no such thing



Rachel Lazenby stretches in preparation for a one-mile-run test for her physical education class at school.

as physical education.

Dr. Pat Lipira, dean of the kinesiology department, remembers those days as well.

"I think we're getting away from that 'throw out the ball' image, she said. "I think we've gone from team sport education to lifetime sports."

"Education is for life. And if we can't show that what we're teaching has lifetime value, then it's difficult to defend it."

However, the benefits to children tossing a rubber ball around or swinging the tetherball around the pole can be overlooked. Lipira recognizes that recess is part of a child's day that can have a great impact on that child's scholastic level.

"Recess is necessary," Lipira said. "Research has shown that they're going to perform better in spelling, math and reading when they have breaks."

Physical education majors at Southern will benefit from the increasing need for physical activity in the 21st century.

"All of our [physical education] majors have had no trouble finding jobs," Lipira said.

Lipira emphasizes that physical education majors need to understand that teaching comes first and coaching, of any kind, comes second.

"When we hire a P.E. teacher, we're very interested in the fact that they want to teach and they understand the importance of curriculum," Alley said.

Also, physical education majors looking forward to shining coaching careers should be prepared for a possible change of heart.

"When I graduated college, my plans were to coach at the college level," Armstrong said. "When I student-taught at the elementary level, it totally changed my opinion of what I wanted to do."

Recess and physical education each impact the social, physical and mental development of children.

"In this day and age, we really need to drive home that childhood obesity and childhood diabetes is just so out of control that we really need to try to impact our kids toward the right way to do things," Armstrong said. "They [students] are a clean slate. They want to learn, participate, and they want to do things."



Matthew Ditto enjoys the unregulated activities involved at recess as a much needed break from classes.







# Marital Bliss

Column by Kayla Rinker

Illustration by Brian Huntley

## Is your married life wonderful?

(Note: I made the mistake of allowing my husband to read this column before it went to press. He felt it was only fair that he add his personal comments to the story).

Married life is wonderful.

That's right, wonderful. *[I'm the man!]* I know, I know, I am a far cry from the expert given that I have only been married six months. But I do think that my husband Josh and I have a special gift when it comes to understanding each other's wants and needs. Also, we don't care how stupid, disgusting, looney or annoying the other one of us is. *[The less I complain, the fewer "headaches" she has.]* We still think being eternally vowed to one another is just wonderful.

For instance, I don't mind taking the extra two or three seconds needed to twist the toothpaste lid tightly back onto the toothpaste tube so that Josh doesn't freak out. *[I don't freak out.]* I understand his need to have soft, crust-free toothpaste. *[Is that too much to ask?]* Married life is wonderful.

He thinks it's cute that I don't put gasoline into my car until I absolutely have to. He has learned that I consider making it to Casey's on fumes alone a skill very few possess and many admire. *[How many gas stations do you think she drives by every single day?]* He usually just looks at the gauge and, with clenched teeth and a glare, he smiles. Married life is wonderful.

During our first few months of marriage, Josh and I had no air-conditioning to accent our beloved trailer. Considering we tied the knot at the end of May, the searing heat of the humid Midwest air had real potential to smother us. We didn't let the intensity of the times get to us, however. We made the best of our sauna-style home with one box fan. *[Kayla bought another cheap fan, but it broke the day after she bought it.]* To cope, we each took cold showers and tried to stay as far away from each other as possible, especially during the heat of the day. *[It's 105*

*freakin' degrees and she wants to cuddle.]* Married life is wonderful.

During those same beginning months we also lived life without the advantages of a washer and dryer. That was really no problem. Not having a means to wash our sweaty clothes really just gave me an excuse to go over to my Mom's house and bother her. *[At least I could get some home-cooked meals at her Mom's.]* It almost felt like I was away at college again. Only this time the piles of dirty laundry consisted of things like boxer shorts and crusty baseball pants. Did I mention how much I love washing his filthy underwear? *[Filthy? Why don't you shut your pie hole?]* Married life is wonderful.

Oh, and I don't mind consistently working to keep a pitcher of sweet tea made. We must never run out. One day I decided to switch it up a little bit and make some refreshing lemonade. Big mistake. Sure, he drank a glass of lemonade – but only because there wasn't any tea. He suggested that in order for a long and happy marriage there should always be tea in the refrigerator. *[When I made that suggestion I meant for her to make the tea, not me.]* That's no problem because, hey, I like tea, too. *[If she likes tea so much, you'd think she would go ahead and drink the last two ounces of the pitcher instead of putting it back in the fridge.]* Married life is wonderful.

He also doesn't seem to mind my little morning and evening ritual. Before going to bed or before starting my day, I pop my fingers and my back. *[And I thought hearing my alarm go off in the morning was bad.]* It's a habit I picked up sometime during Junior High. It's kind of funny, like stretching or letting out a big yawn. I pop myself. It does kind of creep Josh out that I can pop my joints so easily. *[It's a concern to me knowing that I'm going to be the one taking care of her crippled arthritic body when she's 40.]* He has now asked me to kindly wait to do the "popping of the knuckles routine" until after he

leaves for his little morning ritual in the bathroom. Married life is wonderful.

For some reason, I have allowed my shoes to take up permanent residence in the living room area of our home instead of the closet. When I come home from class or work, I immediately plop down on the sofa and remove my shoes. This bugs him a little. *[I think it's a combination of the clutter and the smell.]* The truth is, our closet is really too small for all my shoes anyway. *[Why do you need 20 pairs of shoes for only two feet?]* and I'll probably wear the same shoes again the next day, or maybe the day after. Did I mention that married life is wonderful?

On occasion, Josh has an extra-long nose hair poking out of his nose and looking straight at me. *[I don't think this is something everyone needs or wants to hear.]* It's not his fault and I know that, but that doesn't stop me from wanting to try my best to lovingly yank it out. (Like I said, it is looking at me). Most of the time the unwanted hair is long and coarse enough to pull out using only my fingers. Normally, it takes several tries to succeed in destroying it. It is a very touching moment to say the least, and I can tell by the glistening tears in his eyes that he is moved, too. *[I don't know for a fact, but I think the pain is similar to childbirth.]* Married life is wonderful.

With that said, I think it is safe to say that our commitment to one another will get us through anything. We look past each other's faults and embrace each other's quirks.

Nothing can stand in the way of the underlining fact that we love each other unconditionally... not even really honoring the fact that he wants to eat chili on everything *[I'm a real man!]* and has to have his shirts folded the way a department store folds them *[OK, maybe not.]* or mentioning that I have an emotional outbreak once every two months *[She cries like a baby.]* and I sometimes forget to close the door when I'm using the bathroom ... married life is wonderful.



# Body Billboards

Photo Illustration by Brian Huntley

Story by Alice Hossain

Photos by Andy Tevis

## Tattoo artists provide a glimpse into the world of body art.

The red liquid spread on Robert Mesker's chest looks like blood. As tiny razors penetrate the skin, his blue eyes framed with black-rimmed glasses grow into hypnotized staring. A gentle buzzing sound like a dentist's drill cuts the silence.

Jim Peters' rubber gloved fingers handle the little, black machine with calmness and confidence that could have only evolved from 31 years of experience.

Peters owns Ink Illustrations, a tattoo studio in Joplin. His suntanned face concentrated as he applied red ink to his apprentices' unfinished heart-shaped tattoo.

"When I was 17 I decided to get my first tattoo, but it was too expensive for me," Peters said. "The one I wanted was an amount I did not want to spend. I thought for that money I could go home and do it myself. So I did. With a needle and some Indian ink I tattooed 'Harley Davidson' on my arm."

Peters' tattoos have since then multiplied. Nine silver shining circlets in his left ear reflect the sunlight; and a handful of skulls and a couple of spiders decorate his arms. He is especially proud

of the tattoos decorating both of his legs.

"I have a black traditional Hawaiian tattoo along my right leg," he said,

"It shows abstract Polynesian shark-teeth. On my left leg there is one tattoo in progress. Right now, there are just the black outlines."

Peters dedicates himself to the art of tattooing, and there is no end in sight.

"I like creating something new," he said. "Sometimes I do not like the people I have to deal with. But I will probably end up doing tattoos until the day I die. I keep saying I'm going to retire, but I haven't done it yet."

Retiring might be impossi-

ble for him, especially since his wife Margaret is also tattooing.

"When I first met Margaret, she did not want to have anything to do with tattoos," Peters said, "But we went to tattoo shows where she met all my friends. She has been tattooing for more than 10 years with body and soul."

Because they share a love for the occupation, he is bound to the

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**"When I was 17 I decided to get my first tattoo, but it was too expensive for me ... I thought for that money, I could go home and do it myself. So I did. With a needle and some Indian ink I tattooed 'Harley Davidson' on my arm."**

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**Ink Illustrations, a body piercing and tattoo studio, is located on Main Street in Joplin. The studio specializes in uniquely designed tattoos.**

art of tattoo in the truest sense of the word.

Even a man who achieved every single aim in his life has one unrealized dream. Today he wears his dream in the form of his unbuttoned black Hawaiian shirt detailed with blue and yellow island flowers.

"I like traveling around a lot, especially to Hawaii," Peters said with a longing glance in his eyes. "I would like to live in Hawaii one day. People there are just like those in California, where I originally come from."

This dream might not be that far away. Winona Martin, one of the biggest names in the tattoo world and close friend of the Peters, owns a tattoo studio at Waikiki Beach.

Along with Martin, there are many other excellent tattoo artists who influenced Peters.

"Gill Monte is a friend of mine who tattooed a lot of movie stars," Peters said. "He has his own style of tattooing, a style everyone wants to copy today. Jack Rudy can be called the pioneer of photographic quality work. He has specialized in doing portraits."

Peters learned from Kelly Tacketts, too.

"She likes colorful and highlighted tattoos," he said, "She is not only a great artist, she is the one who influenced me most."

Learning various techniques from these people helped in developing his distinctive style, style VIPs appreciate, too.

"I tattooed the lead singer from the band 'Sabotage,' basketball player Seth Mayberry, the actors William Forsythe and Andrew Divoff and Elizabeth Taylor's ex-husband's new girlfriend, only to name a few," Peters said.

Most of his clients, whether celebrity or average, know exactly

what they want: An extraordinary masterpiece applied to their skin done by a master of arts. For that reason, ferocious dragons, nasty mermaids and Indian tribals are a part of his daily work. A slight smile appears in the corners of his mouth when he remembers the craziest tattoo he ever did.

"Once I had a guy who wanted to get his Social Security number, name and his address tattooed on his arm," Peters said. "He said it was because when he gets drunk and the cops find him, they do not have to wake him up to find out who he is."

Peters has high expectations and always meets these claims, although there are some circumstances he regrets.

"Many people just want to save money," he said. "Money is more important for them than the actual artwork. No matter how well done the tattoo art. If it does not tell a story that involves you emotionally, then it is just there for decoration and not a valid representation of tattoo art. If you want to get a tattoo, try to be original. Don't just pick up a magazine and copy the stuff other people have."

Robert Mesker, the 23-year-old apprentice at Ink Illustrations, not only internalized Peters' philosophy, his whole body is an expression of his individuality. He has a labret, several other lip and cheek piercings along with stretched ears with two black rings in his earlobes. His arms are colorful, and he has a traditional American tattoo that sailors used to have applied on his arm.

Mesker started to work for Ink Illustrations two years ago. Originally he worked in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as a piercer. Though being an apprentice in a tattoo studio sounds quite extraordinary, Mesker's daily routine does not differ that much from other apprentices.

"I work from around 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.," he said. "I get



**Jim Peters, owner of Ink Illustrations in Joplin, has been working in the tattoo business for more than 30 years.**



paid for the tattoos that I do, but not for the time I spend in the shop. Despite this fact I usually work all day long," Mesker said.

It took him four years to get an apprenticeship. Most shop owners want to have \$10,000 if they take a beginner. After paying, they introduce the apprentice into the longed-for world of tattooing.

"The reality of it is that the shop owners take your \$10,000, go on vacation and leave you there with mediocre artists, though you want to learn from the boss," Mesker said.

"That is why it took me four years to find a tattoo studio to become qualified properly. I really enjoy working for Ink Illustrations."

His clients enjoy the style he has perfected since he started his apprenticeship.

"Once I did a big, Celtic dragon with all the complicated knots, lines and figures on a guy's back," Mesker said. "I had to have a calm hand, the patience of a Tibetan monk and four hours of absolute concentration to get it done."

When he finished he felt as though he had just carried a 300-

pound bag of steel. Despite his exhaustion, he was extremely happy with the outcome of his work.

Mesker has his own view on the tattoo business that is going on today.

"Tattooing would not be in the position it is today without its past," he said. "People are being forced to gradually accept tattooing because more and more people are getting them like college students as well as movie stars and housewives. I am very interested in the history of American tattoo culture with all the fighting and struggling to get tattooing where it is. I am much more interested in the past than in the business today."

Chad Terry, professional body piercing artist at Punkteur in Joplin, is strongly influenced by his past.

"I am half Cherokee and the culture, heritage and the rituals of the Indians interest me," Terry said. "That is one of the main reasons why I do body piercing. I started to learn it when I was 17, and I have done it professionally for about six years."

A blue and white bandanna helps keep his dread locks together, while he glances over the pages of the personal photo album that



Tattoo specialist Jim Peters prepares to fill in shades of color to a tattoo on Robert Mesker's chest. In order to properly administer a tattoo, the artist must shave all body hair in and around the site of the tattoo and make sure the surrounding surface area has been cleaned.



showcases some of his works. They reveal Terry's handiwork with brandings, cuttings and piercings. However, he enjoys working unusual requests the best.

His stretched earlobes pierced with silver rings and his nose piercing attest to his experimental vein.

"I go a little further than most piercing artists usually go," he said. "The craziest branding I did was what is called a 'tree of life.' This is a geometrical figure with circles and lines. I put it on the guy's back. It was two-foot-tall and a lot of fun to do. The guy I put it on wanted it to be very theatrical."

There is one taboo, however, that Terry refuses to do.

"I would never ever pierce someone under anesthetic," he said. "The person has to be fully conscious."

Getting a professional tattoo is not as easy as it seems.

"We have a lot of people coming in from Oklahoma because tattooing is illegal there," Terry said.

"In my honest opinion, it should be legal there, because of the simple fact that what they end up with when it is illegal is people doing it illegally. They end up passing out all sorts of diseases and horrible art work, because these amateurs were not professionally trained."

He says there are unprofessional people everywhere, but especially in a state where it is illegal. This is dangerous, he said, not only for the people who want to get a piercing without complications, but also for the reputation of professional piercing artists. In years past, the health department did not monitor piercing studios.

"They would come to a shop and totally inspect the whole place except for the piercing area," Terry said. "They monitored tattooing, but they did not monitor piercing, which is ridiculous. We even had to invite them for inspections."

The Association of Professional Piercers specializes in monitoring piercing studios. The APP is an international nonprofit



Robert Mesker works as an apprentice at Ink Illustrations in Joplin.

association dedicated to the distribution of vital health and safety information related to body piercing, healthcare providers and the general public.

"It is extra paper work, extra money and extra licensing, but it is a good thing," Terry said. "This will prevent bad artwork and, additionally, upgrade the art of body piercing."

People like Fakir and Sky Renfro dedicated themselves to upgrading piercing. Fakir is known for his 50 years of research and personal exploration of body decoration and rituals. Various media have labeled him as the "father of modern piercing." Sky Renfro has worked as a professional piercer; he has managed piercing establishments and has more than nine credentials.

Terry respects everybody who shows devotion and respect to this kind of art. Because of commerce and changing trends, many people only concern themselves with the superficial aspect of piercing. For that reason Terry is afraid that devotion and mutual respect in this business is waning.

"Today the majority of people get piercings without thinking about it," he said. "I want people to do it for reasons other than, 'Hey, this is a cool thing' or 'everybody has one.' Otherwise, I want to see it in the underground, as it was back in the old days."

Terry looks forward to facing many more challenges in future.

"I like things that test me," he said. "This business includes constant learning. I like to be able to remind myself that there is always a next step to take."







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